SATYAGRAHA A STUDY IN GANDHIAN DIALECTICS

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ABSTRACT

Dialectic by definition is that conflict of reason where the individual is confronted with two conflicting issues, both of which are equally plausible, and a solution is sought. An integral part of Gandhi's Satyagraha is a philosophy of conflict, which seeks to reconcile or synthesize ends and means through a philosophy of action. According to Bondurant "Satyagraha refers not to an end product, but to a means for achieving agreement. It is dynamic, not static. It allows for the fullest realisation that means are ends-in-the-making, or ends in process". 39 Thus, Satyagraha may cogently be analysed in terms of dialectic. The Gandhian dialectic, which forms the kernel of Satyagraha, quite unlike the Hegelian and Marxian dialectical system, does not refer to noumenal phenomenal system, nor does it merely describe some metaphysical order. It is a process, to be made explicit by human action, not to be found as implicit either in the nature of things or progress of time. It is prescriptive in nature not descriptive (as compared to Marxian dialectics).

INTRODUCTION

Through the dialectical method, Hegel showed that the universal spirit establishes itself during a necessary development from unconscious existence in the inorganic world of only mechanically moved objects, through the organic world with its inherent chemical and biological forces, into the conscious world thinking beings - man - in whom the former stages are included and transcended. The Absolute Reason, then gains consciousness and finds expression and real development from then on in arts, sciences, history, literature religion, until it finally reaches full consciousness of self in philosophy. Hegel thus wanted to grasp the meaning of all and everything with history being the center of his attention. Necessity will take its course, he asserted.

The 'March of God on earth' gave him a clue as to what the important events of his time really meant. Convinced that each stage was an improvement on the previous one, a new thesis, he was prepared to justify the depredations of Ghenghez Khan, Napoleon and paved the way for Nazism. He thus became the ideological grandfather of proletarian revolution. The concept of 'Superman', 'superrich' where one race would eventually govern all other races, The "Aryanization of Europe" by Hitler, are only corollaries of Hegelian dialectical process. Marx was critical of the Hegelian dialectical approach. In the western philosophical tradition, there had been dialectic in earlier systems like that of Heraclitus (who greatly influenced Hegel) and Meister Eckhart, who developed the three steps of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, but Hegel was the first to work dialectic into reality with sciences and historical events providing factual data, and the essentially dialectical development of nature through the instrumentality of man. Marx felt that dialectic as used by Hegel, did not allow for an empirical approach. He did not reject the technique altogether, but retained it as a system of logic applied to human activity. solely as an interpretative mechanism. Instead of the abstract human being of Hegel, Marx set man necessarily working in a particular social environment, on the one hand, and basic human needs on the other. Through this interaction he developed the theory of class struggle, and discovered the potentiality deep within each individual to radically alter situations in order to improve his living conditions.

Gandhi did not proceed from any specified political ideology, yet the significance of his Satyagraha in the field of political action is inestimable. Gandhi had his reasons for differing from both Hegel and Marx. With refernece to Hegel, Gandhi would support Marx in saying that dialectics, indeed all philosophy must be grounded in experience, have a social orientation or direct bearing on human action. That is the farthest Gandhi would go with Marx, according to Bondurant "Inherent in the Gandhian approach, is a rejection of the Marxian (as well as the Hegelian) development of dialectic in the direction of predetermining the content of both thesis and antithesis - a development which in Marx defines class struggle and anticipates a synthesis in the realisation of a classless society were, of course, the dialectic process must for Marx end.

The force or dynamism of the dialectical process is compromised by the introduction of historicism by Hegel and Marx, for the content of process is supplied through the dogma of class struggle. Thus, we find that Hegelian dialectic is a system of logic delineating inherent, natural processes, Marxian dialectical is a method based a man's class relationships which

predetermines both the nature and direction of the conflict, while Gandhian dialectic of Satyagraha is only describing process that results from applying a technique of action to any conflict situation. That one does not have to be a Hindu or subscribe to Gandhi's metaphysical views in order to use his technique of Satyagraha is amply borne out by facts to the effect that people from diverse religions and cultures like the Pathans of NWFP, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and scores of others have successfully experimented with it. The guiding principle of Satyagraha is simply that it is based on the realisation of relative truths and rejection of absolutes. That the technique of Satyagragha too follows the triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is made perspicuous in the following manner. First and foremost, every Satyagrahi is expected to analyse the character of the total conflict situation. The force within any dialectical situation is derived from the clash of opposing viewpoints, within a given situation. The immediate objective in a conflict situation is to restructure the opposing viewpoints so as to facilitate the achieving of situation mutually satisfactory to both parties, such a situation if reached, will present itself as an entirely new circumstance the so-called Hegelian Synthesis. That Gandhi never wished to take undue advantage of his adversaries or embarrass them is evidence of the fact that a Satyagrahi's attempts were not to seek a one-sided triumph, but seek a victory (not over any particular enemy), but over a situation in the best manner possible. How does Ahimsa come to play a pivotal role in Gandhian dialectics of Satyagraha? An answer to this question takes us back to Gandhi's critique of Marxian dialectics, also recapitulation of his metaphysical background.

Firstly, Marxist dialectics is a contradiction in terms. The dialectical process being dynamic, is essentially evolutionary in nature. Each stage or thesis, breeds within itself its own antithesis. Interaction between thesis and antithesis leads to a synthesis. Being a natural process, there is absolutely no need to force change, for each stage in human history carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. Marx has therefore wrongly identified the dialectic process of Hegel as revolutionary; it is highly evolutionary in character.

Class struggle lies at the heart of violence. Since Gandhi does not acknowledge the existence of any such concept like 'class struggle', he sees no place for violence in his scheme of dialectics. The dogma of class struggle is in term based upon a meta-dogma of absolutism or clash of stereotypes. Marx begins with the basic premise that interests and aspirations of owners of capital and workers are absolutely irreconcilable. All capitalists are of the same

variety profit minded and rapacious. Capitalists on the other hand regard workers to be nothing more than a factor of production, and an extremely difficult one to handle - workers are thought to be dishonest, sluggards, who must be paid just enough to Keep body and soul together. Both sides see the picture in black and white, neither willing to acknowledge the fact that there might at least be shades of grey. if not other colours of the rainbow. Marx and his followers advocated the path violence to wrest from the bourgeoisie what ought to belong to the proletariat. This would an unending process, for the firebrands of today usually become fireproof pillars of the establishment tomorrow. The proletariat of today is bound to become the bourgeoisie of tomorrow, and the reign of violence once unleashed will never be stopped non stemmed.

As already stated, the guiding principle of Gandhian dialectics and Ahimsa is the realization of the relativity of truth and rejection of absolutes. Elsewhere in this Part, I have talked about Gandhi's early influences, wherein I alluded to the profound effect that the New Testament had upon him. Relativity of truth and Ahimsa are stellar virtues in the parable where Christ upon seeing a woman being condemned to death by stoning, entreats only those people in the crowd to cast stones who themselves have never sinned. Needless to say, not a single stone was flung, for how could the crowd be absolutely certain that the woman was a sinner? Did they know her entire background? Such reasoning convinced Gandhi that there was no such thing as an objective absolute, known to any man. Yet Satyagraha etymologically meant sticking to the truth, which necessarily had to be relative. He sought to resolve issues through recognising that each standpoint could embody a valuable view of truth. The fallacy lies in extremism, and abstraction from other aspects. Gandhi therefore sought to integrate or win over an opponent through persuasive methods. This is exactly what the *Jaina* doctrine of *anekantavada*, states, "Each viewpoint is true in SO far it draws attention to actual and indispensable aspect of the Reality has infinite aspects, of which we can know only a few. Consequently, we are not in a position to make categorical statements and must prefix, "Syad" or 'relatively'. to whatever we state i.e. Syadāsti..... 'Relatively a thing is. The Madhyamika Buddhists contend that four alternative views are possible on any subject. There are two basic alternatives- Being (Asti), and Non-Being (Nāsti) - Affirmation and Negation respectively. Two more alternatives are derivable through affirming or denying both at once: both Being and Non-Being (asti - cha - nāsti, neither Being nor Non-Being (Na asti - na - nāsti). Each of these make sense, for with reference to its own time and space, can say of we any object that it exists, while at the same

time from the point of view of some other space and time it is non-existent. We could affirm or deny both being and Non being, either simultaneously or successively.

In his Philosophical Investigations, while criticising his Tractates, Wittgenstein too criticised essentialism in language and held that there no such thing as one and only one meaning of a word. Meanings of words were conventional, in so far as they depended entirely upon how one used the words, much as how one used a screw driver, either to loosen screws or stir paint in a tin. Meaning was relative, part of a language game.

Thus, if truth is relative, there can be no room for a clash of stereotypes or class struggle as in Marxian dialectics. No difference of views is irreconcilable. Should conflicts of interests arise, all that is called for is an analysis of the entire situation, in order to grasp the nature of the conflicts and through employing nonviolent persuasive methods (allowing the opponent every opportunity to state his case), demonstrate the correctness of one's own position, and try win over the adversary, without wounding his self-respect.

Another reason for Gandhian dialectic being non-violent in character, is due to his acknowledging the fact that there exists an inviolable relation between the means and the end. The means are only the end in the making, a manifestation of a hidden or implicit potential in the originator of the end. Following the Samkhya theory of *Satkāryavada*, which holds the effect is not different from the cause, in that an oak tree does not grow from a mango seed, Gandhi contends that the goal of a peaceful and progressive nation cannot be born out of violence and anarchy.

CONCLUSION

Thus, while he believes in the maxim 'The means justify the end', Marx and other leftist thinkers subscribed to the theory that "The end justifies the means". Both Gandhi and Marx sought to eliminate dehumanisation and exploitation of man at the hands of man, but their paths differed because they subscribed to different ethical and metaphysical considerations. Marx was prepared to employ any technique, good or bad, moral or immoral, to reach his goal of classless Society, while Gandhi equating a noble end with noble means, followed the path of Ahimsa, (both in politics, social dealing and economics) to achieve his goal of Swaraj, a free India in which Sarvodaya (welfare each and every of individual, not only the worker class) would be the end to be attained. We found that Satya, Ahimsa and Satyagraha are so interrelated that it becomes impossible to treat them separately. Satyagraha, as already shown,

is a direct corollary of Satya and Ahimsa. It is 'Ahimsa in action'. Satyagraha thus provides a practical expression to the religion-metaphysical ideals of truth and non-violence.

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